SPRING 2016

# PERSPECTIVES

A publication for members of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors

## FUTURE OF FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE

### THE FUTURE OF FRATERNITY

| By Judson Horras

### REMAINING RELEVANT

| by Amber Garrison Duncan

### THE CAMPUS PROFESSIONAL OF THE FUTURE

| by Dan Wrona

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Listen up...it's about to get real! Throughout my term of serving as your Association's President, I have continuously spoken about the need for change and to move beyond the status quo. I have issued challenge after challenge to the membership to think and do our work differently. For many, change is hard, and for others, they welcome it with pure eagerness. When we think about the industry of fraternity and sorority, change is often met with opposition, especially when we think of this notion of "tradition." Other times, it is embraced regardless of it if hurts or not. I would argue now is the time where a few of our industry leaders are embracing change with high levels of tenacity.

In this issue, you will find the call to action theme is continued, and I fully and wholeheartedly support these efforts. Regardless of if we agree with the changes we have seen, heard of, or experienced, the reality is that it is time. Time to do things differently and push our industries of higher education and fraternity and sorority in the right direction that will never again question relevancy of our existence. A time where the two industries would further compliment each other for the betterment of both the student experience on campus and life beyond. We cannot remain in a place of complacency. If that is indeed your mindset, get ready to be stuck by yourself while the rest of the professional world around you moves on toward greater progress. As you read through the pages of this edition of Perspectives, I hope you find conviction to do better and to be better. Listen to (and re-read if necessary) the words, advice and insights being offered and be ready to implement whatever is necessary to move your organization, campus, and yourself forward. Others are watching, so let's begin to think about what image is being created for viewing pleasure.

Sincerely,

Veronica Moore

Veronica Moore

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

While in graduate school, I took a road trip to New Orleans for one of my best friend's birthdays. We kicked off our visit to the historic city with a stop at one of the many fortune tellers (yes, total tourist trap). Perhaps fortune telling and palm reading isn't your thing. I'm not sure it's mine either, but we were having fun with it. $20 and five minutes later, my friends and I knew the rather general and widely-applicable secrets to my future.

Wouldn't it be great if determining our futures were just this easy? We could just sit down at a little, rickety, metal folding table, pay a sum of money, and learn all we need to help us make more informed decisions. Okay yes, this is unrealistic. But here's the thing – there are people surrounding us daily who are subject experts and are able to make informed, educated predictions about where things could and/or should go. Pull up a chair.

This past fall, the fraternity/sorority industry was broadly exposed to NIC 2.0. For many, this was revolutionary because generally-speaking, we are accustomed to tradition and holding tight to power given, granted, earned, or taken. Finally, leaders in the industry were harnessing the collective influence of their organizations, considering their future in partnership with their constituents, and redeveloping to better meet the needs of their members in a rapidly changing world. At the same time, Dan Wrona and Rise Partnerships were completing research to redevelop the First 90 Days program, a long sought goal for AFA. Their research points to the need for campus-based professionals to reconsider their work within the quickly shifting context of higher education. Tightening budgets, a diversifying student body, and a call for alignment of student learning don't exactly play nice with tradition. These two monumental shifts, alongside Amber Garrison Duncan's work with the Lumina Foundation, were shining a light on the future of fraternity/sorority life. We were excited to make them the backbone to an issue that could explore multiple facets of the future of fraternity/sorority life.

We can collectively do a whole lot better if we are willing to consider our future and begin making informed decisions on what is coming. We can't worry about next week. We need to be thinking five, ten, fifteen years down the path and implementing small, manageable changes now that will make a lasting impact on our work in the coming decades.

Sincerely,

Annie Carlson Welch

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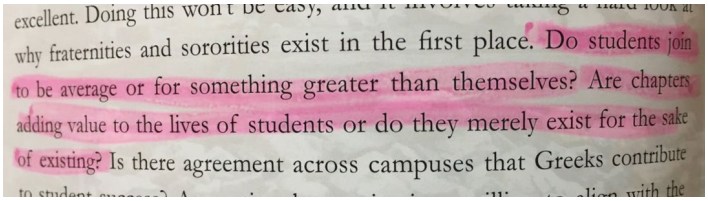
# ON SOCIAL MEDIA

On Facebook from Jeremiah Shinn

Great execution of a great idea. This is a must-read issue. There are some thoughts in here that I hope will frame our collective thinking for years to come. Nice work Annie (and team)!

On Twitter from Jessi McPherrin

Rereading @afa1976 Perspective and can't stop thinking about these questions. #AFAPerspectives


excellent. Doing this won't be easy, and it involves taking a hard look at why fraternities and sororities exist in the first place. Do students join to be average or for something greater than themselves? Are chapters adding value to the lives of students or do they merely exist for the sake of existing? Is there agreement across campuses that Greeks contribute to student success? Are we aligned with the

On Facebook from Dan Bureau

Terrific job. Love the concepts and the idea of contributors across topics! Nice work to the editorial team! Proud of how Annie Carlson Welch has built on an already excellent publication.

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# IN THIS ISSUE

## THE FUTURE OF FRATERNITY

JUDSON HORRAS

Fraternity is at a turning point—a critical moment. One might say heightened media coverage fueled the fire to bring us here. While the scrutiny has perhaps never been greater, the media doesn't define this crux. Others might say the high profile incidents mounting on college campuses landed us here. While those shine a light on what must be transformed, they also do not define this moment. **Page 9**

## REMAINING RELEVANT

AMBER GARRISON DUNCAN

We are living in a time where there are a host of innovations reshaping higher education. Over the years, many of the changes in student affairs and higher education have been sustaining innovations as they were iterations on established practices bringing about incremental improvements in student outcomes. The type of disruptive innovations taking place now are altering the core functions of campuses in ways bringing about social change and are requiring professionals to rethink their work (Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, & Sadtler, 2006). **Page 12**

## THE CAMPUS PROFESSIONAL OF THE FUTURE

DAN WRONA

In spring 2015, RISE Partnerships was commissioned to redevelop the First 90 Days program. In order to ground the program in sound theory, evidence, and logic, RISE first conducted extensive research on the fraternity/sorority profession uncovering the ideologies, knowledge, skills, and abilities professionals find most helpful in their work. After triangulating the results of a literature review, a document review, a member survey, and a series of interviews and focus groups, it became clear current and future environments demand a change in the dominant ideologies guiding our work. **Page 16**

## COLUMNS AND HIGHLIGHTS

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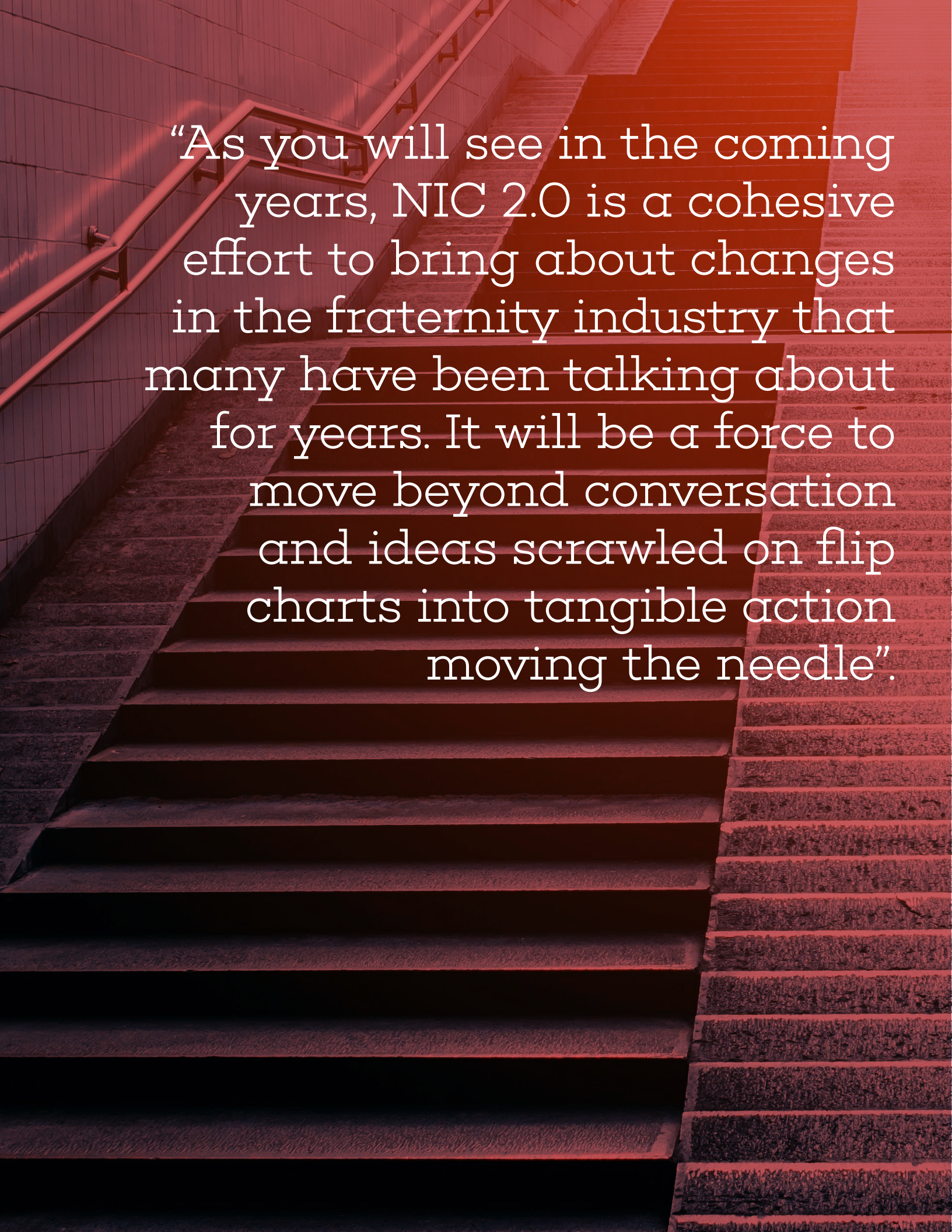

"As you will see in the coming years, NIC 2.0 is a cohesive effort to bring about changes in the fraternity industry that many have been talking about for years. It will be a force to move beyond conversation and ideas scrawled on flip charts into tangible action moving the needle".

# THE FUTURE OF FRATERNITY

**By Judson Horras**

Fraternity is at a turning point—a critical moment.

One might say heightened media coverage fueled the fire to bring us here. While the scrutiny has perhaps never been greater, the media doesn't define this crux.

Others might say the high profile incidents mounting on college campuses landed us here. While those shine a light on what must be transformed, they also do not define this moment.

What makes this moment—this crossroads—distinct, unlike any other in our long history, is the unprecedented collaboration of leaders and organizations working together toward change.

From fraternity executives to campus professionals to alumni to students, in the last year, the call for change has been loud and clear. While the juncture is more critical than ever, the North-American Interfraternity Conference and its championing voice is collective and strong. Our member fraternities are invested in the changing trajectory through an extraordinary level of interfraternal commitment to work together.

This is our moment to seize.

"The future of fraternity is in the present. Collectively, we must seize the moment to push the needle forward. Together, we can create vibrant, healthy fraternity and sorority communities."

Through such collaboration we can foster the transformation needed to create the vibrant, healthy fraternity communities—one community at a time.

Convened around this challenge, the NIC is hitting reboot. We are reshaping our 107-year-old organization to enact positive changes to ensure the fraternity movement thrives in the future.

Yes, the new NIC will still be a trade association for the fraternal industry, but you will see its culture shift in conjunction with its reframed priorities. We will operate more like a cutting-edge technology company, creating resources and solutions to address common problems traditional approaches no longer answer. Our tone will focus around the values of humility, strong work ethic, and teamwork. By staying true to this culture, we hope to inspire the industry to embrace a similar paradigm to collaboration.

## RAISING THE MEAN

When a new fraternity chapter opens, it is only a matter of time before this group moves toward the mean on campus—before culture trumps training. In short, an individual group is only as good as the community in which it resides.

This concept also applies on the national level. No single organization has the ability to impact culture on a scale grand enough to place it above the influences of the rest. Today's interconnected world no longer allows one chapter or organization to live in isolation.

To this end, to improve one fraternity, collaboration among all fraternities is required.

However, collaboration is not something that has come naturally in the field. For too long our industry has talked about interfraternalism, yet we have been unable to rally around a common vision with the clarity and direction to make a long-term investment in the larger system.

As you will see in the coming years, NIC 2.0 is a cohesive effort to bring about changes in the fraternity industry that many have been talking about for years. It will be a force to move beyond conversation and ideas scrawled on flip charts into tangible action moving the needle.

Member organizations are investing at a historic level, so we can achieve our vision to impact campus communities through increased, strategic support based on the five new priorities of the NIC:

Create an effective grassroots program for all Interfraternity Councils (IFC) and provide exceptional support for "Focus Campuses" in an effort to strengthen and build healthier fraternity communities.

Develop consistent educational programming for all IFC officers, staff, and volunteers.

Create a database allowing members to make data-driven decisions, share best practices, and streamline operations.

Lead a sophisticated public relations efforts to advance the "Fraternity" brand.

Produce effective advocacy programs strengthening higher education partnerships and utilize governmental and legal affairs.

## CULTURE OF ABUNDANCE

Our vision for the future of fraternities is bold, and it will be achieved through collaboration, not unhealthy competition. We seek to create a culture of abundance—an industry inspiring and promoting collaboration and encouraging all ships to rise.

Do not get me wrong, healthy competition is good. It is why I follow my alma mater so closely during basketball season.

It is unhealthy competition that needs to end, because it often leads to protecting turf instead of embracing positive change. In this situation, success for one organization often comes at the expense of another. Whether it is our members placing barriers on fellow students who seek to form a new fraternity chapter, or councils creating restrictive recruitment policies impeding students from joining an existing chapter, we must work harder to help grow the pie instead of carve it up into smaller pieces.

## ROLE MODELING

In recent years, we know the NIC has lost the confidence of some of our members and many of you in the field. We must lead from the front rather than behind on key issues, (re)building the confidence of our stakeholders.

In our vision, we will develop and nurture meaningful relationships, role model effective and efficient business practices, and devise and share operational strategies from which all of our members can benefit. We must exhibit and demand excellence and continuous improvement at all levels, employing initiatives enhancing accountability. We must be willing to do the work we ask others to do.

Our members' increased financial commitments will allow us to be more proactive and solution-oriented. We believe an association of like-minded and values-based fraternities is an essential vehicle to provide a clear and compelling strategy for moving our industry forward.

In becoming an industry role model, we cannot lose sight of the values and practices we hold sacred. We will continue to defend the opportunities of our students to thrive in organizations by joining

in the time and manner that best suits their development. Equally as important, through nearly unanimous passage of NIC 2.0 reforms, we have embraced elevated standards, greater partnership with higher education, and a willingness to take on the sacred cows holding our industry back.

## IT'S PERSONAL

We each have a driver for our investment in advancing fraternity, for choosing a career in this field. Many of us had powerful collegiate experiences and want to foster meaningful involvement for future students. Others are motivated by the impact of fraternity on the students with whom they work.

It is personal for me, too. It is about my children. I dream of a college fraternal experience for Anna and Andrew including heightened academic achievement, affinity to their alma mater, civic engagement, and an enhanced sense of identity and self-worth. But if our community does not rise up to the challenges facing our industry today, I am unsure my children will be able to enjoy a fraternity and sorority experience as meaningful as those my wife and I treasure.

I took on this role because I know the future we envision is possible, but the change we need cannot be made by the members of the NIC alone.

## HITTING REBOOT

In our case, rebooting is not as easy as it is on your laptop. Over the next several years, we ask for your patience. Our vision will take time to be realized. We know you have high expectations of us — we do, too — and we will strive to exceed them in due course.

Further, you are key to our success. We need you to say "yes" — "yes" to volunteering in one of our new advisory roles, to sending students to our programs, to remaining open minded to a new way of supporting fraternities, and to engaging us often and directly. We need your sincere feedback, so please call us, and when you call, work with us to find a solution.

We need you to tell the powerful story of fraternity and share what it can bring to our students and our communities. And we need you to engage your organizations and students in doing the same.

We need you as a teammate to work with us to defeat stereotypes and defend fraternity.

The future of fraternity is in the present. Collectively, we must seize the moment to push the needle forward. Together, we can create vibrant, healthy fraternity and sorority communities.

Let's get to work.

*Judson Horras is the President & CEO of the North-American Interfraternity Conference. After more than 18 years serving Beta Theta Pi - over 8 as the Administrative Secretary — he took on this role in 2016 to lead the NIC into the future. Jud is a graduate of Iowa State University; he lives in Indianapolis with his wife and two kids, who he hopes will enjoy meaningful fraternity/sorority experiences in the near future.*

# PUTTING VISION INTO PRACTICE

NIC 2.0 will provide elevated services, opportunities, and accountability to our members, impacting fraternities and communities for the better. These initiatives are tied to the five new priorities and long-term vision of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) outlined in the accompanying article. While these things will not happen overnight, we are inspired by what we will create to advance the future of fraternity.

- Establish a robust staff of regional and local professionals to provide Interfraternity Councils (IFC) and Focus Campuses with training, accreditation and support for community issues, campus policies and crisis response.
- Develop and train strong, local alumni IFC volunteer teams, who will supplement existing support efforts provided by the NIC.
- Furnish member fraternities and IFCs with 24/7 access to crisis management and public relations support, consistently building and maintaining the fraternity brand.
- Provide training and credentialing opportunities for campus professionals, IFC officers, and key regional and local volunteers.
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive and integrated data warehouse to enable data-driven decisions, track and monitor performance, and to effectively share best practices and resources.
- Create a Fraternity Growth Accelerator to enable qualifying member fraternities the ability to thrive through self-identified, customized resources and services unique to their composition.
- Offer award-winning educational and leadership programming such as UIFI, IMPACT, and IFC Academy, and administer training on hazing, sexual assault, and alcohol use to all NIC fraternities' undergraduate members.
- Reinforce and intensify the depth of relationships with NASPA, AFA, APLU, and other key associations within higher education.
- Enhance accountability to NIC Standards through performance-based evaluation.
- Increase transparency of Standards performance through reporting on several key indicators and drive aspirational benchmarks to incentivize member achievement.

# REMAINING RELEVANT

## TRADING IN BEST PRACTICES TO RESPOND TO EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS IN FRATERNITY/SORORITY LIFE

**By Amber Garrison Duncan**

We are living in a time where there are a host of innovations reshaping higher education. Over the years, many of the changes in student affairs and higher education have been sustaining innovations as they were iterations on established practices bringing about incremental improvements in student outcomes. The type of disruptive innovations taking place now are altering the core functions of campuses in ways bringing about social change and are requiring professionals to rethink their work (Christensen, Baumann, Ruggles, & Sadtler, 2006). Campuses on the leading edge of these disruptions are increasing student completion, especially for low-income students and students of color, because they employ professionals that use a best practitioner frame of mind.

While there are several innovations for student affairs professionals to consider (see Garrison Duncan & Kruger, 2015), there are three that seem especially important to discuss with fraternity and sorority professionals: data analytics, common learning outcomes, and comprehensive student records. However, before I dive into these two topics I must share a consistent theme across all the innovations on the horizon is they will demand professionals use evidence to make decisions about their work. As a result, professionals must be prepared to make assessment and reflection a part of their daily work.

"WHAT HAS BEEN MISSING IN THE CONVERSATION IS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING AND SPECIFIC DEFINITION OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE UPON EARNING A DEGREE. AS A RESULT, HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYERS ARE FOCUSED ON DEFINING THE SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES BEHIND DEGREES AND COMMON LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORKS FOR DEGREES ARE EMERGING."

## DATA ANALYTICS

It has been said campuses are data rich and evaluation poor, meaning we have lots of information, but we don't necessarily use it to understand the effectiveness of what we do (Christakis & Demeter, 2015). Campuses house large amounts of data without ever mining and integrating data from across the campus. Several have done this in an effort to analyze and understand models of student behaviors and activities leading to the highest rate of graduation. In the past, this was left to higher education researchers who could analyze and make assumptions broadly. Now institutions are able to use data to analyze patterns of student performance, persistence, and completion, and create predictive models for their specific students and campus dynamics. Much of the power also lies in the disaggregation of this data so patterns can be broken down by student characteristics, such as gender, race, major, course attendance, fraternity/sorority affiliation; and use of services such as advising, counseling or a recreation center.

Once campus models are created, instead of waiting for students to come in and utilize services when they are in trouble, analytic modeling can be used to be proactive with students through the creation of early alert systems. These systems alert campus professionals if students are not on a path resulting in retention and allows professionals to understand where intensive staff support or intervention with students may be needed. To automate contact with students, technology solutions exist tying these alerts to text message and email reminders to students for immediate feedback, encouraging students to follow up on their own.

In addition, as continued analysis is conducted, practitioners can identify where programs or services are not contributing to student success. In a time where resources (money and staff time) are scarce, this is valuable information to assist in budget and staff time allocations. This is another way best practitioners use evidence to ensure resources can be directed to those practices making the most difference for students.

## COMMON LEARNING OUTCOMES

For at least the last 15 years, the student learning outcome movement has been under way with an emphasis on making learning outcomes transparent to students, parents, and employers. In fraternity and sorority life, professionals are developing learning outcomes for everything from formal recruitment to leadership programming and service. However, while academic programs and other campus constituents have developed learning outcomes, the question remained for the student, "So, what does it all add up to? What do I know as a result of my degree and college experience?"

What has been missing in the conversation is a common understanding and specific definition of the knowledge and skills that students should have upon earning a degree. As a result, higher education and employers are focused on defining the specific learning outcomes behind degrees and common learning outcomes frameworks for degrees are emerging. For example, the Essential Learning Outcomes (visit http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes) were introduced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2005 to define the essential learning outcomes every college should aspire to provide for graduates. Several years later, the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP, http://degreeprofile.org) was developed to define the actual learning outcomes for associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees.

With clearly defined degree level outcomes, institutions are using the DQP to align curricular and cocurricular learning experiences that when combined, add up to the learning defined in a college degree. The impact for fraternity and sorority life is we should be familiar with the degree level learning goals at our institution, intentionally align or create programs to facilitate learning that can then be assessed and contribute to a student's degree outcomes. Students in fraternities and sororities are engaged in more programming than the average student, and leaders are taking on major projects allowing them to test knowledge learned in the classroom. If we want to be seen as an equal partner in student learning, we must be able to document we are contributing to the learning outcomes needed to earn a degree. It will not be enough to write learning outcomes for a program or as a department if the outcomes do not link up to the broader degree requirements.

Many student affair divisions and some inter/national organizations are already developing a common understanding of the core outcomes provided across the fraternity/sorority experience contributing to degree learning outcomes. By using tools such as curriculum maps—or, specifically, cocurriculum maps—professionals are able to understand where intentional programming provides learning that is mapped to degree learning outcomes (Ewell, 2013).

## COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT RECORDS

Even if we are assessing the learning taking place under our supervision, the student is still left with translating that to employers. Employers are asking for student records that are not simply a list of course numbers and credit hours. Instead, they want to know what a graduate knows and is able to do (cue, learning outcomes). In an increasingly digital world, resumes are machine read for keywords and descriptions before a student would even be able to talk with a recruiter. Never has it been more critical for students, employers, and the higher education community to make use of a student record meeting all of their needs. As assessment of student learning in the curriculum and cocurriculum becomes more widespread, new student records are emerging that captures the specific learning outcomes a student has met. Extending the transcript into a more comprehensive record based on the defined common learning outcomes mentioned in the previous section ensures students, employers, and higher education have an usable and transportable record.

> "WITH CLEARLY DEFINED LEARNING OUTCOMES LISTED ON CURRICULUM MAPS, ADVISORS AND OTHER CAMPUS PROFESSIONALS CAN PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS ABOUT WHERE THEY CAN FIND LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT WILL GET THEM CLOSER TO THEIR DEGREE."

While there are systems in place for faculty to communicate student learning and performance, this will require innovation for student affairs professionals and inter/national organizations wishing to contribute student learning to these new records to develop robust and comprehensive systems and protocols to capture the assessment from cocurricular learning. Specific models to inform these systems are currently being developed in a project facilitated by NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and AACRAO: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (Fain, 2015).

In addition to being a student record for use at the end of the degree, some institutions are also using comprehensive student records as a tool to provide advice and guidance to students about gaps in knowledge and skills needed to fulfill degree outcomes. With clearly defined learning outcomes listed on curriculum maps, advisors and other campus professionals can provide guidance to students about where they can find learning experiences that will get them closer to their degree. Fraternity and sorority professionals will need to be prepared to use these records to facilitate more intentional learning conversations with students.

## CONCLUSION

As you reflect on the information shared about these disruptive innovations, I challenge you to think about yourself as a best practitioner. Disruption always lead to opportunity, and this is the moment where fraternity and sorority life can be involved in student learning and success in new ways. However, it will require you to think differently about your work, try new programs, interact with students in concert with faculty, and hold yourself accountable to using evidence to determine if what you are doing contributes to the broader scope of degree outcomes. It is time to trade in those practices that no longer fit and challenge each other to think about how fraternity and sorority life can contribute to the future of higher education by focusing on student learning and degree completion. At the next meeting or conference call with a colleague, ask them what is new or innovative they are doing and what evidence they have to support their thinking.

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# THE CAMPUS FRATERNITY/SORORITY PROFESSIONAL OF THE FUTURE

By Dan Wrona

In spring 2015, RISE Partnerships was commissioned to redevelop the First 90 Days program thanks to a partnership between the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Foundation, and Sigma Chi Fraternity. In order to ground the program in sound theory, evidence, and logic, RISE first conducted extensive research on the fraternity/sorority profession uncovering the ideologies, knowledge, skills, and abilities professionals find most helpful in their work. After triangulating the results of a literature review, a document review, a member survey, and a series of interviews and focus groups, it became clear current and future environments demand a change in the dominant ideologies guiding our work.

Because there are infinite opportunities to improve fraternity/sorority life, it becomes tempting to invest in things students should be doing on their own (e.g. managing recruitment, coordinating service initiatives, building community, etc.).

The field of student affairs has been expanding since its inception, and it now includes multiple functional areas, each with its own specialized approach to facilitating institutional success. The area of fraternity/sorority life has followed the same pattern of expansion and specialization. A few decades ago, an institution may have assigned one entry-level staff member to be partially responsible for fraternities and sororities as part of their larger role in housing, organizations, or conduct. It is now more common for institutions to dedicate staff members exclusively to fraternity/sorority life and for those professionals to have more experience and education. Over time, the responsibilities of the campus fraternity/sorority professional have expanded to include the roles of risk manager, counselor, student organization advisor, event planner, housing manager, educator, presenter and facilitator, disciplinarian, and more.

As institutions become more concerned with measures of student retention, persistence, graduation, and preparation for a global society, professionals in a number of student affairs functional areas are rethinking their work, and fraternity/sorority professionals must do the same. Are the roles of counselor, advisor, event planner, educator, and disciplinarian appropriate, or should they be reinterpreted? What measures of success will be irrelevant in the future? Are the current strategies the best way to achieve these aims? What common practices should be abandoned as ineffective or unnecessary? As the Association approaches its 40th anniversary, perhaps we are due for a midlife crisis – a time of transition where we reflect on what has come to be expected of a campus fraternity/sorority professional and to redefine the role around more relevant priorities for the future.

The results of RISE's research related to the First 90 Days program provide clues about how the role might change. The following concepts emerged as important ideas that should guide the work of campus fraternity/sorority professionals. These concepts represent a shift in ideology towards a role that is more relevant in the changing environment of student affairs and higher education.

## Measure effectiveness by institutional objectives, not by fraternity and sorority objectives.

The campus fraternity/sorority professional does not exist to help Greeks do Greek life better, but to help members of fraternities and sororities better achieve the objectives of the institution. Members are responsible for their own performance in the areas of service, philanthropy, academic achievement, membership size, program participation, leadership and involvement, campus events, organizational effectiveness, and sense of community. Student affairs professionals, however, should be more concerned with academic and social integration, living experiences, institutional commitment, academic behaviors, financial means, student safety, cognitive and moral development, and other variables influencing student success. Although fraternal and institutional objectives may occasionally overlap, the responsible use of institutional resources demands campus fraternity/sorority professionals start from institutional rather than fraternity/sorority priorities.

A number of problems arise when campus professionals structure their work around helping the community meet its own goals. Because there are infinite opportunities to improve fraternity/sorority life, it becomes tempting to invest in things students should be doing on their own (e.g. managing recruitment, coordinating service initiatives, building community, etc.). By accumulating unnecessary responsibilities, professionals set unreasonable expectations for themselves and find it difficult to make time for more significant work. Because these activities may improve the state of fraternity/sorority life, they are assumed to be important, but they can only be justified by rationalizing and attempting to "prove" they support institutional objectives. In reality, they may not address the top priorities of the institution in the most effective way.

Campus fraternity/sorority professionals must be able to clearly articulate a direct connection between their work and student success. Doing so requires putting aside what is assumed to be important. We must begin by setting specific objectives for student success aligning with the institution's priorities, examining elements of fraternity/sorority life that might get in the way of these outcomes, and then structuring the work around addressing these elements. In doing so, many current practices would be eliminated as unnecessary, unimportant, or student responsibilities.

## Elevate the focus to strategic, system-wide success.

Campus fraternity/sorority professionals operate in an environment pulling them in two opposing directions. They are expected to serve as direct facilitators of individual student development through advising, programming, and event planning (a micro level perspective) while simultaneously operating as a strategic manager of a complex environment (a macro level perspective). In this tug-of-war, micro-level efforts often win out because they are easier, more immediate, and a more natural fit to most professionals' talents. Micro-level activities are not unimportant, but when fraternity/sorority professionals fail to align their daily work around a larger strategy for

system-wide success, it can lead to a series of misguided, disjointed initiatives lacking any connection to institutional objectives.

The changing environment of student affairs and higher education calls campus fraternity/sorority professionals to rebalance their focus in favor of macro-level strategic thinking. It means investing in initiatives changing the environment for all students rather than change-the-person or trickle-down-advising strategies only reaching a few students for a short time. It requires incorporating organization theory, environmental management, and systems change into professional development efforts in place of topics like counseling, education, and student development. Taking a more strategic focus will challenge professionals to reevaluate how they allocate resources, to set higher standards for what issues get attention, to work towards aligning micro-level efforts with one another around a larger objective.

### Integrate services with other departments.

Most student affairs professionals work in a single functional area (e.g., career services, academic support, residence life, student conduct, financial aid, etc.) serving the entire population of students. Fraternity/sorority professionals, in contrast, serve a subset of these students across many of these areas. It may be tempting to replicate these services within a fraternity/sorority office, but doing so wastes resources, further isolates the fraternity/sorority community, and shields students from the expertise of those who are specialists in each functional area.

Campus fraternity/sorority professionals must see themselves as responsible for partnering with other departments to ensure students have a clear pathway to these services. Their role is to help functional area specialists organize their services to address members' unique needs. There is much more to be gained from bringing students and stakeholders together to arrange new and existing initiatives than from building the same initiatives internally and in isolation. This concept calls fraternity/sorority professionals to operate as generalists and to develop skills for navigating relationships and establishing partnerships throughout campus.

### Reexamine ideologies and professional development priorities.

As stated above, many professionals embody the idea of a campus-based fraternity/sorority professional as a risk manager, counselor, a student organization advisor, an event planner, an educator, a presenter and facilitator, or a disciplinarian. These roles were accumulated as the field evolved based on changing campus needs, but they are no longer sufficient to define our work. Professionals will need to welcome their role as a strategic manager of complex problems affecting institutional objectives in a subset of the campus population. This will require them to develop higher-level skills in institutional assessment, strategic management, relationship building, and systems change.

### Redefining the campus fraternity/sorority professional

Like our student affairs peers, it is time for campus fraternity/sorority professionals to rethink their work to incorporate these guiding ideas. Professionals must see themselves as responsible for achieving institutional objectives, developing and implementing strategy, forming vital collaborations, and developing abilities and systems supporting operating in this way. This means we can no longer assume current practices are appropriate and rationalize their importance. It means seeing ourselves as the hub of an interdependent network of departments rather than an isolated, self-sustaining island. And it means integrating and aligning existing initiatives more often than creating new ones.

Campus fraternity/sorority professionals can bring these ideas into practice by evaluating and systematically shedding activities that do not logically, directly, efficiently, or measurably contribute to student learning and success. There may be more important priorities than leadership programs, advising appointments, and service trips. Some responsibilities may need to be reassigned to fraternity/sorority members and organizations where they belong. We will also find there is more to be gained from integrating existing initiatives with one another by working with campus partners across multiple departments than from creating many new responsibilities for ourselves.

There is some truth to the mid-life crisis analogy. At a certain point in one's life, the day-to-day minutia can become overwhelming, and individuals begin to seek purpose, ask big questions, and engage in work that matters. Fraternity/sorority professionals are now called to set aside what has become common practice and to work with more purpose and intention on things that matter. The ideologies, abilities, and practices we have accumulated may no longer pass this standard. It's time to grow up and do better work in better ways.

*Dan Wrona is CEO and Project Leader of RISE Partnerships. He has provided training and consulting on more than 200 campuses, and contributes his expertise in instructional design, strategy, systems-thinking, risk prevention, and culture change to advance fraternity/sorority life.*

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# TRANS INCLUSION

## NEW FRONTIERS & UNEXPECTED ADVENTURES

By Jessica Pettitt and Kaye Schendel

Almost a decade ago, I started working with my first organization, Gamma Alpha Omega Sorority, Inc., regarding its non-discrimination policy and the inclusion of trans members. Individual National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) have quickly examined this issue and have taken many different stances. "At least they are having the conversation," is how I typically respond when National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) organizations would quietly approach me about the topic. Gamma Alpha Omega's National President, Lorena Galindo, commented they still are in conversation on some topics and could use "best practice" information regarding supporting members during gender transition.

While this is a request I frequently receive, the truth is, there isn't "best practice" information widely available for fraternities and sororities. We are building the plane while we are flying it.

I am confident the "triangle model" is a best practice in getting the conversation started. I have presented this model, as have many of the readers of Perspectives, and I hope this continues. Breaking down sex, gender, sexual identity, and the policing of sexism and heterosexism needs to be understood before we write policy or organizational statements. With a foundation of language and a mutual understanding every person on your board, in your organization, and at the metaphorical stakeholder table in fact has their own sex, gender, and sexual identity, we then took on Title IX concerns (spoiler alert – there aren't any – social fraternity and sorority membership practices are exempt) and now we are focusing on the "outsourcing" of gender determination and its impact on our organization's First Amendment Rights, Freedom of Assembly, and the like. More and more organizations are publicly, or quietly, rolling out stances on trans inclusion and things are not always going as planned. Like any policy, discussing something and then typing it up isn't the end of the story.

"Breaking down sex, gender, sexual identity, and the policing of sexism and heterosexism needs to be understood before we write policy or organizational statements."

Here are some key pieces to plan for as your organization tackles this new frontier.

First – there are two sides of the policy or statement rewrites needing to be accounted for that most do not consider. Your language needs to be clear. Your organization is likely a single gender organization (not single sex) meaning you don't know the hormonal, chromosomal, or genitalia make up of your members, nor do you want to make it a part of the new member selection or intake process. As a single gendered organization you need to be clear as to who may both become and remain a member. A trans person may have transitioned prior to affiliation or after. Meaning someone's birth assigned sex may not be how a potential new member identifies when they enroll in college or become interested in your organization as a non-undergraduate member.

In a recent educational session with a NIC Fraternity, which preferred to not be specifically named, a contentious conversation was taking place with the Board Members. The one undergraduate delegate from South Carolina stated, "if he looks like a guy, and I think he's a guy, then I don't know what the big deal is with giving him a bid." Sometimes it can be this easy. A current undergraduate or alumni member of your organization may also be transitioning, so they would no longer be identifying with the gender with which they initiated into your organization. It is your responsibility to determine who can become and who can remain a member. Once a member, what is your organization's process for disaffiliation if a trans person no longer meets the organization's requirement to remain a member? You get to make up these rules too, but you need to make them up following your organization's procedure. Often, organizations just defer to the state or campus regulations. This is problematic and leads to inconsistent experiences chapter to chapter. State and Campus Policies cannot be used as legal cover for your lack of policy clarification as to what makes a man or a woman. As fraternities and sororities, we are claiming to be building better men and women through our exclusivity. We can't have it both ways. Moreover, when you do take on this conversation, you need to do it YOUR way, not at the demand of a university or non-member. Delta Gamma recently modified its publicly presented Position Statement on Non-Discrimination to read:

Delta Gamma is committed to diversity and does not discriminate on the basis of race, religious affiliation, color, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, marital status, physical disability or other characteristics protected by state or federal law. Membership is open to women and transgender persons who identify themselves as women.

Delta Gamma will need to determine (if it hasn't already) what will happen when a member questions their gender identity and begins to transition while an active member or as an alumna. Don't get me wrong, this is a great start but it leads to more questions. Other organizations immediately started contacting me to help them write their own Position Statement on Non-Discrimina-

tion. At first glance this seemed fantastic, but I soon realized that not every organization's governing documents call for this kind of statement.

Do your policy and process your way. An organization failing to follow its own procedures will lead to confusion and potential internal conflict. Please check your governing documents to see what kind of member qualification statements or policies exist – if any – and what process your specific organization needs to go about to add or edit existing wording. Sometimes it is a board decision; sometimes it is a constitutional amendment done at a Convention; sometimes it isn't specified. Only the organization can make a decision of membership eligibility and should only attempt to do so after understanding its process and educating its membership on the issue.

Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity and I have worked closely together during a number of board meetings to discuss the trans inclusion conversation. We had a series of conference calls with alumni, undergraduate students, and volunteers on the calls to ask questions and propose case study-like situations so they could develop their own policy. What impressed me most about this particular policy change process is Sigma Phi Epsilon never seemed to stray from its organizational values and processes. They stood by their decision and really set an example for other organizations. Archie Messersmith, Volunteer Services Director, stated "our National Board felt very strongly this was a membership decision, and thus, should remain at the chapter level."

Here are some questions Sigma Phi Epsilon has received from undergraduate chapters who are interested in admitting a trans student. As your organization considers moving from a policy to practicing, these are questions we will all need to grapple with:

If Ritual involves something not trans inclusive, can it be changed without offending our Founders?

What does it look like to truly welcome someone into a chapter who in their opinion "looks like a woman?"

What about housing? What if the only option is communal showers? Do accommodations have to be made or can the House Corporation say, "Sorry, we own this house, we make the rules?"

What about national leadership programs where undergrad attendees are paired together at random? Our University partners (that I have spoken with) have shared "all parties living on a multi-sex/multi-gender floor would have knowledge of that and would opt into that living environment" What do we do when folks are paired together in a cabin or hotel room?

How do knowledgeable alumni help educate less knowledgeable?

Hannah Seoh, from Delta Phi Lambda Sorority, Inc. and current Chair of the National Asian Pacific Islander American Panhellenic Association, added more questions continuing to come up after they updated their policy:

How should policies be defined to be inclusive of transgender members?

Since we do have one member who is a Brother of Delta Phi Lambda and prefers pronouns he/him/his, does that open up the organization into being forced to accept members in the future who identify as male? Would that change the whole concept of single-gender organizations?

Sisters have been very supportive, but does that necessarily mean they agree? How would we know if some members didn't

# INCLUSIVITY

Here is some language to be familiar with in regards to the Trans Community. It is important to note that these words are social constructs that are developed over time and new language is constantly forming.

**Sexual Identity**
Something all people have the describes their sexual, emotional, etc., relationships or the lack there of (heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, etc.)

**Trans**
Umbrella term for anyone without cis or cisgender privilege in that they do not identify as they were labeled at birth.

**Transgender**
Typical more inclusive term for Trans people that aren't interested or able to access hormone treatment and/or surgeries to alter their physical bodies.

**Transexual**
Term to describe trans people that do access hormone therapy and/or surgeries to alter their physical bodies.

agree if they don't speak up?

How do we continue to educate members about our Brother?

What's the best format/arena to have this dialogue? How often?

How can we incorporate lessons into our new member education or recruitment process centering around the idea of what it means to be an ally and why our organizations value trans inclusion?

Another NPC group started conversations about inclusivity, and it was questions like these slowing down the process. A staff member said to me (off the record), "I think we're moving a little bit slower, not because our philosophy is wrong or we're not on board, but out of concern related to taking policy into practice." Many women's groups like to have most, if not all, of the answers before jumping in. They want to provide good resources and a full methodology behind "why" a policy or process was adopted. What I love about this response is I had to check the source's organization, because I hear this all the time. It seems like of all the NPC groups I work with, no one wants to be last, but being first has a huge risk to it – after all building a plane while flying it is not a good technique.

Kaye Schendel, President of Sigma Sigma Sigma, is currently finding this out. In her last three years as President, the roll out of what I believe to be the most comprehensive and inclusive policy clarification is coming with expected push back. What wasn't expected is the push back is more from the details than the overall concept of trans inclusion.

Tri Sigma's statement reads as follows: "A potential new member who self-identifies as a woman shall be treated as a woman regardless of any other circumstances."

I like to paraphrase Tri Sigma's policy like this, "If a woman lives by our values they can be invited to join. If a member questions their gender while a member they can benefit from our full support through this process for life." This addresses both sides of the issue and is crystal clear. The organization hired its first trans/gender non-conforming staff member as a traveling consultant, has figured out the housing and roommate situation, and even pulled together a great educational packet for all members, undergraduate and alumnae, with great success, or at least no push back.

We have a long way to go, and that is why it is an adventure. Beth Stathos, Stevie Tran, Fraternal Law Partners, and others are keeping this conversation stirring. I, nor this issue, are going anywhere.

For more resources and information or to send over some of your own best practices, contact Jessica Pettitt directly at Engage@GoodEnoughNow.com.

*After speaking for over a decade, Jessica Pettitt, CSP, now travels chapter to chapter to give back to NSA. Learn from her mistakes and accidental smart choices no matter how many years you have been speaking, and laugh along the way. She is an open book; be careful what you ask her, she will answer it.*

*Kaye Schendel is the Director of Global Initiatives at Delta Upsilon International Fraternity and also serves as National President of Sigma Sigma Sigma.*

**Cis or Cisgender**
The dominant privileged reality of a person's affirmation of birth sex assignment, gender based socialization, and aligned perception of others. The term is being used to describe those individuals that are not included in the Trans umbrella or larger community and may or may no identify as Trans Advocates or Allies.

**Gender Variant/Queer**
Someone that isn't affirming or conforming to masculine/feminine gender identity or expression binary spectrum.

**Consider Pronouns**
A big component of social Greek-organizations is that we have men and women in respective organizations, however not everyone identifies with 'he/she' pronoun usage. Respect and use and individual's pronoun preference as well as name preference.

**For more information please visit: www.iamsocialjustice.com**

# EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF FRATERNAL RESEARCH

By Charles G. Eberly and Ari Stillman

The idea of conducting wide-scale research on fraternities, sororities, and their members has been a long sought objective of higher education professionals. When the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity (CSCF), now Center for Fraternity and Sorority Research (CFSR), was founded in 1979 at the behest of the American College Fraternity Bicentennial Commission, it was done so in recognition of the burgeoning need to "encourage, support, conduct, and disseminate fraternity and sorority research" (Veldkamp, 2013, p. 2). The Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (AFA) had just been founded three years prior to facilitate communication and collaboration between then-loosely organized campus professionals and the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) (Bureau, 2006). This period marks the beginning of the modern (inter)fraternity movement – a term often used to encompass a common agenda amongst stakeholders who believe in the value of fraternities and sororities and want to see them flourish. Quality research and assessment necessarily lie at the core of the (inter) fraternity movement; without studying ourselves and our peers we cannot presume to advance what we do not know beyond empirical and anecdotal evidence.

Research, in its broadest sense, serves to advance a field and expand the boundaries of what is possible. Therefore, we propose an agenda not only upholding the institution of fraternity/sorority life but growing it in a positive direction. What follows is an informed suggestion of future possibilities given modern data collection, analysis, and dissemination practices as well as a challenge to researchers to produce the kind of research outcomes needed as the fraternity/sorority industry expands and works to overcome misunderstandings and misinformation.

A considerable amount of fraternity/sorority research in recent years has been reactive and focused on addressing media-related anti-fraternity reports of behavior. Themes of hazing, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual misconduct, and other aberrant behaviors uncharacteristic of the ideals of fraternity are thus associated with Fraternity due to infractions being celebrated and generalized in popular media. Some might contend there is not enough research conducted on these topics because the problems will persist no matter how much educational programming students receive. The issue is not a lack of research, however, but there is limited assessment conducted on the effectiveness of the various prevention programs that have emerged promising to reduce the occurrences of reported hazing, sexual misconduct, etc.[1] The desire of institutions and headquarters to indemnify themselves after a series of lawsuits in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the public outcry that ensued, has driven a burgeoning market for prevention programming and what Gentry McCreary (2016) has called "Check the Box Education"[2] in order to be FIPG-compliant. While reducing the risk to students (and would be-violators) is a primary factor behind prevention education, the lack of assessment demonstrating program effectiveness remains a gap waiting to be bridged in higher education.

Better designed research needs to be carried out in these sensitive areas, and it must address core issues rather than the symptoms. Additionally, it must offer suggestions on ways to actionize research findings in concert with campus administrators, alumni, and undergraduate members. This is the first step we propose. The second step falls both to campus-based practitioners and headquarters professionals to responsibly introduce effective measures aimed at deterring egregious behaviors from happening in the first place. Then comes step three: assessing the efficacy of the mechanisms introduced to deter egregious behaviors in order to refine them accordingly until they accomplish what they are designed to accomplish. Naturally, steps two and three must be repeated continuously since new students coming to campus change the nature of the college student population every few years. As the college student population changes, so does the nature of the issues that must be addressed. The process of higher education is not a static enterprise, and if the fraternity/sorority experience is a value-added enhancement to education, then educational programming, administrative responses, and the evaluation of programs and procedures will be equally evolutionary.

Institutional research in higher education has grown far more sophisticated than it was in the 1980s when the public first began to demand accountability measures to validate educational outcomes resulting from public funds (Lazerson et al., 2000). Institutional research staff are now charged with the task of demonstrating the return on investment for public, private, grant, and student tuition funding. Assessing outcomes such as retention or persistence rates, graduation rates, and degree completion time, among others, was, and largely still is, thought to "serve as surrogates for direct measures of learning" (Lazerson et al., 2000, p. 9). As Alexander Astin (1985) proposed, a college's quality should "be measured by the value added to its students' learning and by the extent to which a college extended the talents of its students" (p. 12). For fraternity/sorority professionals, the questions are: what is the value of the fraternity/sorority experience, and how can it be unambiguously measured? While the trend toward developing and administering assessments in student affairs is well-intended, not all assessments serve as a valid measure of their purported subject. Contributing factors to this lack of precision include:

"A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF FRATERNITY/SORORITY RESEARCH IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN REACTIVE AND FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING MEDIA-RELATED ANTI-FRATERNITY REPORTS OF BEHAVIOR."

- Practitioners who are not adequately trained in survey methodology asking leading questions, including response categories suggestive of the correct or desired answer.
- Practitioners asking questions requiring respondents to recollect information, as memory tends to be highly unreliable and impacted by previous questions and their wording.
- Practitioners working in their own administrative silos who do not seek consultation beyond their own departments.

While budgetary issues tend to be pervasive and thus drive many in-house assessments, a poorly constructed survey instrument can be worse than no assessment at all.

Survey assessments are not the only methodology prone to flaws. Much of the research done on fraternities and sororities suffers from limitations in research design. Most prior research efforts have been carried out on single campuses using one-time surveys

*[1] The closest thing that comes to it is the Consortium Project's ongoing effort to build an evidence base for hazing prevention, though the Project's research design does not assess the effectiveness of anti-hazing programming so much as guide activities thought to prevent hazing. For more a thorough overview, see http://www.stophazing.org/research/consortium-project/.*

*[2] For more on this, see Gentry's McCreary's editorial "Maybe we should stop talking about hazing." http://doctorgentry.blogspot.com/2016/01/maybe-we-should-stop-talking-about.html*

that were often locally developed. Many past efforts also focused on participant samples that meant the outcomes were limited in their application beyond the specific campus where the research took place. Only now is it becoming possible to reasonably make broad generalizations with regard to student learning and behavior that previously had been projected on the basis of single campus studies, personal testimonies, and media conjectures. This is thanks to the use of nationally administered research instruments using sampling designs enabling outcomes to reflect the entire current undergraduate population in terms of the variables measured by the instruments. An era of data-driven decisions based on defensible, developmental theories focused on student learning and behavior is becoming possible.

Campus administrators, fraternity/sorority headquarters staff, and individual researchers are encouraged to create multi-year research programs using nationally normed, multi-institutional data that will enable identification of trends previously impossible to isolate. Carefully vetted instruments include but are not limited to:

- Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB)
- American College Testing Program (ACT)
- University Learning Outcomes Assessment (UniLOA)
- The Fraternity & Sorority Experiences Survey (FSES)
- Skyfactor (formerly EBI)

By using these instruments examining student input and output, a cross-sectional longitudinal design can be generated resulting in a quasi-experimental design based on new approaches to large-scale data analysis such as Propensity Score Matching (Goldfarb, 2014).

The overall research objective is to generate a large sample, cross-institutional design that is:

1. responsive to the use of modern statistical methods,
2. addresses multiple issues,
3. reduces confounding variables, and
4. works to take advantage of as many possible ways of examining a variable of interest as is currently practical.

Rather than arguing the merits of one major assessment over another for evaluation purposes, we suggest using different assessments each year and then return to start the process over in the fourth year. Most of the standardized assessment instruments are interpreted with normative data based on the most recent three years of collected data (Kuh et al., 2001, p. 41). Measured change in student characteristics, attitudes, and behavior is most likely to appear using the same instrument every three years. Assuming the methodological conundrums can be managed, we move on to the kind of topics that we think merit further research.

"OUR CHALLENGE TO CAMPUS-BASED AND HEADQU
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Simply put, the fraternity/sorority industry needs to generate more research documenting the value-added benefits of fraternity and sorority membership during the college years – not to distract stakeholders from the pejorative topics but because the value-added benefits have been grossly understudied. There are many positive outcomes of the fraternity and sorority experience that should be explored in earnest, such as those touched on in the 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index (Busteed, 2014). While some of the data highlight how fraternity and sorority members are more likely to experience higher well-being post-graduation, such insights are but a starting point for discovering what about the fraternity and sorority experience contributes toward this outcome. How can the benefits of the fraternity and sorority experience be more tangible instead of advocates using personal anecdotes to sell their value to public stakeholders (including prospective members)?

One of the most important ways we can achieve better understanding is through sharing our data across stakeholders. While campus-based professionals and full-time researchers tend to be forthcoming in doing so, headquarters professionals are often hesitant to dispense with their guarded information. However, this information is not so sacred as a Ritual book that its release would compromise the integrity of the organization as once happened with Phi Beta Kappa (Syrett, 2009). The data may divulge some inconvenient truths, but rather than brushing such valuable insights under the rug, sharing them would allow for others to explore these unsettling patterns (potentially in partnership) and propose counter-measures since no fraternal organization to our knowledge has a full-time professional dedicated to researching the organization and its programmatic outcomes. Likewise, it is just as

disquieting to the spirit of inter-fraternalism for affluent organizations to commission a research group to collect data on their alumni/ae and not share it with less privileged organizations that might benefit from such information. This is the kind of assistance most helpful in an NIC 2.0 world for those groups placed in a "Fraternal Growth Accelerator" – a subgroup of NIC members slated to receive assistance in their development. A fraternity is a business, but it is a family business, and inter-group competition has no place at the (inter)national level. Data insularity does little to advance the fraternity/sorority Industry, let alone individual fraternal organizations, and runs contrary to the overarching esprit de corps of a greater brotherhood and sisterhood for all.

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ACTICE. IT CAN BE HARD TO SEE THE VALUE OF
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O DOING BETTER BY BEING BETTER INFORMED."

At the most fundamental level, research on fraternity and sorority members is really research on students in groups. We are all social beings. Understanding the influence of groups on individual behavior and the influence of individuals on group behavior is at the root of understanding the human condition. As microcosms of the wider society, members of fraternities and sororities are ideal subsets of students to recruit as research participants due to their shared common values which can be examined across time.

Throughout its history, the hallmarks of the American college fraternity have been innovation, adaptability, and forward thinking. In our era, these are achieved through the intangible investment of research. If we want to elevate the profession of fraternity/sorority, we need to elevate our commitment to researching the field since research remains at the pinnacle of the status hierarchy of higher education. And with good reason – it is the pathway to advancement, it expands possibilities, and it demonstrates the complexities of a subject. Just as the reformers of the 80s and 90s strove to prove "teaching could be a scholarly, researchable activity" (Lazerson et al., 2000, p. 11), so too must we do the same with student affairs advising. Our challenge to campus-based and headquarters professionals is to use research and assessment to guide professional practice. It can be hard to see the value of investing in the intangibilities of research, for budgets are limited, and we have higher up administrators to whom we must justify expenses. But research is more than just a leap of faith; it is a commitment to doing better by being better informed. And when it comes to the level at which we perform our jobs, that kind of information is priceless.

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BREAKING
RANK

# AND WHY WE MUST NOW

By Cat Sohor

"Breaking rank" is a term used frequently over the past few months within the interfraternal community. I heard it referenced at the 2015 AFA Annual Meeting during meals with colleagues and in public at some of the open forums. I have seen Facebook posts about the topic and within the comment sections on news articles. I have even been personally told I have done it.

# BREAKING RANKS: PUBLICALLY SHOWING DISAGREEMENT OR CRITICISM OF THE GROUP THAT YOU BELONG TO

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines "break ranks" as "publically showing disagreement or criticism of the group that you belong to." This term is often heard in the military or within local law enforcement entities where there are defined membership ranks. In most contexts, breaking rank is seen as a negative behavior by the group.

However, within fraternities and sororities there is a perceived limit to the "ranks" of members. Within our umbrella organizations there is no rank; an inter/national organization is said to be an "equal member" and the voice for its members. Despite the limited ranks within our field, I have witnessed much criticism when our members and organizations speak out and share their opinions, specifically when those opinions don't align with a majority group's position, which makes this even more interesting.

Anytime you bring a group of people together to form an organization, there will be members with a variety of opinions and thoughts. It would be nearly impossible for the elected leadership (such as board members) to fully represent the opinion of every member. This is not where the problem lies. The problem occurs when organization leadership criticizes members for stating their opinion. In other contexts, it seems more accepted to be a member of a group while still disagreeing with some of its actions. Politically, you can be a Republican and be pro-choice or a Democrat and vote for John Kasich. It does not mean you are a bad member or have to leave the political party. It is okay to not agree with everything your group represents, and it should be okay to speak out within the fraternal community.

Unfortunately, we seem to have made it a "crime" in our organizations to disagree with the majority belief. The most upsetting part about this notion of "breaking rank" is the negative connotation it brings. As partners in the interfraternal community, we ask our students to break rank every day in order to confront the issues plaguing our communities. Take a look at any of our bystander intervention programs, and you will see the core component is speaking up, often at times when no one else will. Whether you are a campus-based professional or a member of an inter/national headquarters staff or volunteer, we have all had a similar conversation where we ask a student to be courageous and stand up for what is right. We applaud and recognize the students who do so. But why is it when our peers or colleagues do the very same thing we criticize them? We can no longer say we represent the voices of our members and member organizations if we are not going to allow the voice of dissent to be heard in a safe and supported space.

As an undergraduate member, my chapter had many issues, including an unhealthy new member program. Another member and I "broke rank" and told our fraternity/sorority advisor and alumnae members we no longer wanted to engage in these unhealthy behaviors. Our decision to do this was not well received by some. We were rather public about taking action, and were at times, treated as outcasts in a community where "earning your letters" was a point of pride. The reaction was painfully difficult for young people at such an important stage of personal development. There were alumnae from our chapter that attempted to break off and start a local sorority. There were advisors who criticized us and continued to alienate mem-

> "THE PROBLEM OCCURS WHEN ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP CRITICIZES MEMBERS FOR STATING THEIR OPINION."

bers who didn't believe membership could be earned without hazing. If we have had chosen to remain silent, and did not have the support of our national organization, I do not believe my chapter would still be open today, and the possible negative impact of continuing chapter business as usual would have put dozens of future members in risky situations that could have been avoided.

Some seem to believe by "breaking rank" you are exposing the weaknesses of the organization or group. That might be the case. But why are we more concerned about a flaw being exposed than the reality we have members who are unhappy? Signs of unhappiness, disappointment and discontent can be seen wherever you look. You can see it on social media and through letter writing campaigns. There are men and women who are unwilling to share their opinions out of fear of losing their job or volunteer position. Some organizations are taking note and creating ways for members to share their opinions. These organizations are doing so by hosting meetings for face-to-face dialogues, hosting webinars and conference calls for members to ask questions, and are being transparent about their decision-making processes. Those organizations should be applauded, for they know when we remain silent or punish those who "break rank", we perpetuate a culture of silence in our organizations stunting our growth and creating an environment where unhealthy traditions or practices continue to develop. We cannot fall back into the "this is how it has always been done" herd mentality because it is the opposite of what we espouse. If we do, we are failing our members and ourselves.

How we react to those who speak out sets the tone for what the future can look like. We can choose to embrace it and foster a culture where engaging in an open dialogue is the norm, and we can enthusiastically welcome and encourage members bringing all types of opinions to the table. Or we can react by chastising our members and organizations, creating not only distrust but a culture that leaves members feeling defeated and as if their opinions or pursuit of doing what they perceive to be best for the group does not matter.

As we tackle the tough issues within our communities and organizations, there are going to be disagreements along the way. We must determine when we have an obligation to go along with the group and when we feel we have a moral obligation to speak out in dissent. Leaders of our organizations, associations, and umbrella groups need to create opportunities for members to share their opinions and allow spaces for discourse to occur without dismissing dissenting opinions. In order for our movement to advance, we must grow and evolve. That may have to include creating new ways of communicating with our members and providing more transparency than what was previously expected. For those of us who find ourselves dissenting, we need to ensure we are doing so in a manner that is respectful, productive, and coupled with the willingness to compromise. The future of our interfraternal community depends upon our ability to come together, even during the most difficult times.

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